

# Author launches her third rhyming book with a quirky hook

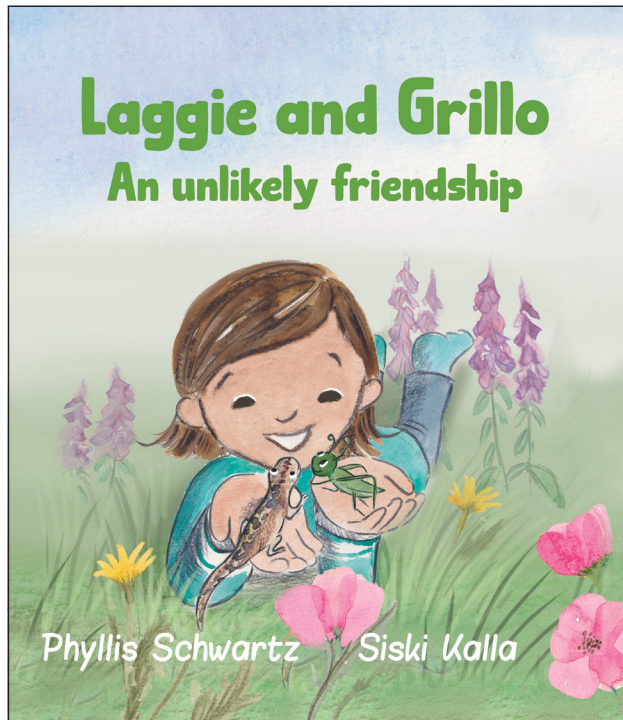
By Catharine L. Kaufman

On the heels of National Poetry Month Phyllis Schwartz will be launching her third rhyming picture book on March 7 titled “Laggie and Grillo: An Unlikely Friendship” between a lizard and a cricket. Partially autobiographical, the whimsically illustrated story reflects Schwartz’s childhood passion for writing poetry that she cleverly used as a tool to vent her irksome annoyances and unleash her creative spirit much like her main character Yoshi, named after her eldest daughter.

When the young girl is assigned to write a poem in school with the rubric including a multi-cultural element, and a theme based on a personal frustration, she’s off and running. Yoshi’s bummed about being denied a puppy by her parents, tempers her anger and fills the void with a scavenger hunt in her backyard that turns up a lizard (Laggie) and a cricket (Grillo). She adopts the odd couple, and the predator and prey soon become best pals unleashing a slew of meaningful metaphors that translate to valuable life lessons like taking seriously the responsibility of becoming a pet owner, respecting others different from us and their cultures, the art of compromise, creating a harmonious community, and, of course, the joy of reading and writing.

Schwartz credits her parents, a pair of history teachers, for ensconcing her in culture, literacy, and travel at a young age, whether it was frequently reading to her, encouraging journaling and letter writing, living in a rural village in India for a year when her father received a Fulbright teaching scholarship, or a family ritual of watching the evening news with Walter Cronkite anchoring life-changing world events.

These adventures had inspired her to pursue a career in broadcast journal-



The cover of “Laggie and Grillo: An Unlikely Friendship”. COURTESY OF PHYLLIS SCHWARTZ

ism. After earning her radio and television broadcasting stripes at SDSU, Schwartz landed a job at KFMB, the CBS affiliate station in San Diego, writing and producing news stories. She then moved to Chicago, climbing up the newsroom ladder at the NBC station WMAQ, where she met her husband Paul, an American of Japanese heritage. All the while, the newshound indulged in her secret pleasure of writing poetry in her off time as an outlet for her homesickness and stress relief.

Alas, her life’s journey took a trio of detours along the route—three different bouts of cancer. Schwartz fought mightily and threw each one under the bus. Throughout this turmoil, she managed to raise two bright, creative daughters (Yoshi and Lily), and used her experiences of motherhood, maladies, and madness in the boardroom as inspirations for her writing.

“Each book has some autobiographical element,” says Schwartz, who incorporates her own challenges as a platform “to encourage families to explore and

talk about tough subjects.” Her first book “When Mom Feels Great, Then We Do Too!” reflects her battles with assorted cancers, trying to put a positive spin on illnesses or injuries by showing the healing power of hugs and family support. Her second book “Mom Wombat Says Make War No More!” is an anti-bullying picture book inspired by personal incidents of childhood bullying on the playground, and adult bullying in the newsroom.

Her new book Laggie and Grillo embraces the languages and cultures of Schwartz’s blended world using snippets of Yiddish from her Jewish upbringing, Japanese expressions contributed by her husband’s ancestry, and Spanish, which is an integral part of San Diego’s fabric, and, of course, Schwartz’s hometown for decades (she now lives in Encinitas). All three books include charming illustrations by Siski Kalla, who also published Laggie and Grillo through her imprint Catch a Leaf. The book offers some fun activities at the end, including a poetry challenge,



Author Phyllis Schwartz. PAUL LEAVESSEUR

and a recipe for a traditional Japanese treat of inari sushi snacks to encourage families to cook together. Schwartz smiles as she admits she loves to eat but doesn’t have the patience to cook.

Schwartz will be signing her book at Warwick’s bookstore in La Jolla (7812 Girard Avenue), Sunday, March 16 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., and Barnes & Noble bookstore

in Encinitas (1040 North El Camino Real) Saturday, March 29 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., along with a story circle reading.

Laggie and Grillo is available in both hardcover and paperback, as well as e-book (Kindle) formats at Barnes & Noble, Warwick’s, and Amazon.

For questions or comments visit [www.phyllisfeelsgreat.com](http://www.phyllisfeelsgreat.com). Additional book signings and appearances will be shared via her social media channels, Instagram and Facebook.

The journalist/poet doles out one last piece of advice to fellow scribes: “Write what you’re passionate about, find a great illustrator, and don’t get frustrated as it’s not an easy road, especially for children’s books.

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